

LINGUA, IDENTITÀ, AUTONOMIA

RAIMONDO STRASSOLDO



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Ricerche e riflessioni sociologiche
sulla questione friulana



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11. Regionalism and ethnicity. The case of Friuli

Versione ampiamente rivista di una relazione tenuta al seminario su "ethnicity and regionalism" organizzato nel giugno 1984 da Paul Claval, nell'ambito del Comitato per la Geografia Politica dell'Associazione Internazionale di Scienza Politica (IPSA), presso la sede di Morigny (Parigi) dell'Università della Sorbona. Una precedente versione, con lo stesso titolo, è stata pubblicata nell'"International Political Science Review - Revue internationale de science politique", v. 6, n. 2, 1985, pp. 197-215.

1. THE BASIS OF FRIULIAN ETHNIC REGIONALISM: AN ETHNO-HISTORICAL SKETCH

1.1. The origins of Friuli

Friuli lies in the northeastern corner of Italy, bordering with Austria and Yugoslavia; or, to be true to a regional perspective, bordering with Carinthia and Slovenia.

Its position, at the northernmost latitude of the Mediterranean basin and at the easiest point of entry from central and eastern Europe into Italy, determined much of its history. Friuli followed the fortunes of the harbour cities that successively flourished at the tip of the Adriatic "channel," to manage the trade between central Europe and the Mediterranean: Aquileia, in Roman times; Venice in modern centuries; and more recently Trieste. In the east-west perspective, from antiquity on Friuli was a frontier, a battlefield, a stronghold and a first settlement for invaders and colonists. In Italy, probably only Sicily has been such a crossroads of races and cultures.

Historians of Friuli belong to two main schools. One emphasizes the non-Italian influences in blood and culture: the Hillirians, the Celts, the Lombards, the Austrians. The other extols the Venet, the Roman, the Frank, the Venetian, the Italian lineage. And, indeed, during 25 centuries these two sets of influences—plus innumerable ones of lesser importance, such as the Byzantines, the French, and the Slavs—left intricate traces on the people and the land. I will not go into historical or ethnographical details here. Suffice it to remember that the name comes from the Roman town of Forum Juli (later called Civitas Austriae, now Cividale); that among the earliest expressions of ethnic-regional distinctiveness is the establishment by the Lombards of a short-lived but prestigious "Duchy of Friuli," in the 7th to 9th centuries; and that the Lombards generally are considered one of the most important components of Friuli's heritage.

The golden age of Friulian mythology extended from the 10th to the 15th century, when the German (Roman-Christian) emperors set up the area as feudal endowment to the Patriarch of Aquileia. In the first centuries of the Christian era, Aquileia had been the bridgehead of the new religion into north-eastern Italy and the Danube basin, extending its ecclesiastical jurisdiction as far as Como and Coira (north of Milan) to the west,

and Noricum and Pannonia (Austria and Hungary) to the east. Since the 10th century, the Patriarch of Aquileia was invested with temporal powers as well, as the gatekeeper of Italy. His domain took the name of "Patria del Friuli". For a couple of centuries, the Emperors appointed to this post members of the leading German feudal families, and sometimes from their own family; and the entire nobility of the region was of German stock. In the XIII- XIV centuries the German-imperial influence weakened, and by 1420 the Patria del Friuli was conquered by the Republic of Venice.

In the following four centuries, Friuli was ruled as a dominion: local institutions, the Patriarchate included, were maintained, but real power was exercised by Venetian governors. Due to its peripheral position with respect to the capital, only belatedly did it attract the interests of Venetian investors in agricultural development; for much of the period, it was managed rather like a frontier, a military colony, important only as a battlefield and no man's land between Venice and her eastern foes, the Hapsburg emperors and the Turks. This neglect explains much of the traits of traditional Friuli: its protracted rurality, its underdevelopment, its cultural archaisms.

1.2. The emergence of linguistic differentiation

A certain awareness of the difference between Friuli and other parts of the "terraferma" is clear in Venetian reports, especially in derogatory terms; as usual in center-periphery relations. Friulians were described as rather wild, miserable, and unruly people, with a broken way of speaking. In fact, the Friulian language displays traits rather different from Venetian and Italian dialects. It belongs to the neo-Latin family, but sounds closer to Provençal and Catalan than to Italian. It also bears some clear marks of a Celtic substratum and of Lombard influences. Unlike all Italian dialects, for instance, the plural is formed mostly with an s, and most words end in consonants.

Such peculiarities generally did not seem important to Friulians. In writing, Latin and then "Tuscan-Venetian" (Italian) were used as a rule. However, some literati, throughout these centuries, used Friulian in poems, giving rise to a sizable body of literature. Some of this issued from a taste of picturesque, of populism; in some cases, for the sake of vulgarity in the current meaning of the term. In other cases, Friulian literature was tinted with political satire of an anti-Venetian, anti-Italian mood.

Of a Friulian race or stock there has been little talk and no serious study other than the usual 19th century ethnographic impressionistic stereotyping. If it exists at all, it can only be a peculiar alloy of at least a dozen different breeds, including the three major ones in Europe—Latins, Germans, and Slavs.

The originality of Friulian cultural expressions in higher and lower arts, in folkways, lore, and mores is also difficult to assess. Local scholars tend to treat everything as unique, but this may be attributed to patriotism and lack of perspective. Outside scholars tend to treat Friulian culture as a variation of the Venetian or Alpine.

The 19th century was crucial to the formation of the Friulian ethnic identity (as it was for most European "folk" groups). Romantic poets and novelists wrote extensively in

the local language, and a "dialectal" literature grew in size, quality, and readership. Ethnographers scoured the countryside, collecting evidence of costumes, tales, myths, songs, rites, and "freezing" them in their volumes. Students of languages began to rebuild the history of large and small local linguistic groups according to the sedimentations of words and meanings. In the case of Friuli, a potent thrust was given by the leading Italian linguist of the period, G. I. Ascoli (who happened to be a Jew, an Italian nationalist and a citizen of the ethnically composite town of Gorizia, in Friuli). He decreed that Friulian was not an Italian dialect, but a distinct language, akin to that spoken in the Dolomite area and in the Swiss Grisons. He called it "Ladino," or "Reto-romantsch," and figured that Friuli be the eastern remnant of a once large homogeneous and continuous ethnocultural area, straddling the Alps from the St. Gotthardt in present Switzerland to Istria, in present Croatia. Ascoli's theory provided the scientific basis for the development of Friulian sense of linguistic uniqueness, originality and dignity, which later resulted in the birth of more broadly cultural self-consciousness and political autonomist movements. His theory, widely embraced by German scholars, was however bitterly contested by later Italian linguists, who attributed the peculiarities of Friulian language merely to the peripheral situation of the region and its isolation from the main currents of linguistic and cultural change in the rest of Northern Italy.

1.3. The epos of migrations

Between 1797 and 1866 Friuli passed from Venetian to French, Austrian, and, finally, Italian rule. Economically, the XIX century was a time of great hardship, due to a classic Malthusian relation between stagnating agricultural output and a runaway population increase (from about 350.000 to 700.000). Emigration was the only alternative to starvation. It had long been endemic in the mountainous half of the region; in the course of the 19th century it became cataclysmic everywhere. Friulians migrated seasonally or for longer periods all over Europe, as far as Siberia (where they worked on the railroad). They settled permanently in America and Australia. It is estimated that between 1871 and 1961 about 400.000 people left permanently the region, and that today the members of the Friulian "diaspora" outnumber those remained in the homeland.

Migrations, both temporary and permanent, moulded Friulian identity. It fed a "migration culture" made up of moving songs of farewell and homecoming, of tales of far countries, of epic hardships endured. It gave authority to women, left home to raise the children and tend the fields. It provided the money to buy land and build homes, sacrosanct symbols of migratory and career success. It created familiarity with many European countries and cultures, making them no more alien than the Italian interior.

The first great wave of Friulian migration started around 1870 and ended with World War I. It was resumed shortly after and drastically curtailed by Fascism. The second wave started immediately after World War II and reached its peak in the late 1960s. Since the 1970s, the flow has ebbed and reversed. Permanent migrants are often organized in ethnic associations ("fogolars"); many of them cling strongly to ethnic traditions and

identity (although it seems that the TV-generation will put an end to this), often in the more purist and conservationist fashion. They return periodically, as summer visitors; and some in retirement. The ties of the Friulian diaspora with the homeland have been instrumental in the mobilization of international solidarity after the earthquake of 1976. Returned migrants have also been in the forefront of the current ethnic-regional autonomist movement.

1.4. "The bulwark of Latin civilization": nationalist and fascist interpretations of Friuli

In the formation of the Friulian contemporary ethnic identity, an important role was played by its location at the frontier between Italy and her north-western neighbors: first the Hapsburg empire, and then Austria and Yugoslavia. Between 1870 and 1915, Friuli became the base-camp for Italian irredentists, bent out to retrieve the last morsels of Italian culture-area still in the hands of Austria (Gorizia and Trieste). Italian patriotism was imposed on this frontier region more systematically and heavily-handed than in other ones, undercutting any possible conception of ethnic-regional autonomy. During the great war with Austria (1915-1918), fought mostly in this region, Italian patriotic propaganda against the Austrian foes became frenzied, resulting in the mass flight of people after the Caporetto breach (a story memorably told by Hemingway in *A Farewell to Arms*).

The Fascist regime added a new, curious bent to this story. It was, of course, staunchly centralist, opposed to every trace of local self-government and utterly hostile to ethnic minorities. But it supported the cultivation of Friulian culture, provided that it stuck to the folkloric level, and that only the neo-Latin strands of Friulian heritage were stressed. Aquileia's ancient civilizing role was exalted, and Friuli praised as the bulwark of Latin civilization against German and Slavic "barbarism". Thus, paradoxically, the first official initiatives in support of Friulian ethnic culture, language and identity bore a strong mark of Italian patriotism.

1.5. The forced marriage with Trieste

After World War II, the destiny of Friuli was heavily conditioned by the Trieste problem.

Trieste was a Friulian-speaking town which since 1382 belonged to the Austrian empire, and thus parted her history from the Venice-occupied Friuli. Since 1715 it was designated as the Empire's main outlet to the sea, and for two centuries enjoyed a spectacular growth, swelling from 7.000 to 250.000 citizens, coming from all parts of the Empire as well as from Italy and the Levant. Although ethnically very composite and cosmopolitan, Trieste's dominant culture remained Italian. After the Risorgimento, an intellectual-professional minority agitated for annexation to Italy (irredentism). It was a complete nonsense from any functional-economic point of view, but the nonsense oc-

curred. When in 1918 the Hapsburg Empire was dismembered Italy acquired still another harbor city for which it had absolutely no use. During Fascism, Trieste tried to develop a role as an Italian bridgehead for the planned Italian-fascist penetration into the Balkans. Italy's defeat in the second world war left Trieste exposed to the vengeance and the appetites of Tito's Yugoslavia; for almost ten years (1945-1954), its international status was bitterly contested. In the midst of the Trieste conflict, while the city and its immediate hinterland were under Allied military rule, the Italian government approved the new constitution (1948), which among other things provided for the setting up of a "special autonomy region" named Friuli-Venezia Giulia. Venezia Giulia was the name Italian irredentists had invented in 1863 to indicate the Trieste region ("Venezia" hinted at the Venetian heritage, although this region never belonged to Venice; "Giulia" at Julius Cesar, and thus the Roman heritage). The provision thus expressed Italy's claims over the territories occupied by the Allied and the Yugoslavs; and envisioned a new region in which Friuli would become the backcountry of Trieste, and, symmetrically, Trieste would become the capital of Friuli. This solution was opposed by the budding Friulian Autonomist movement, which had formed immediately after the war under the leadership of a handful of intellectuals; and understandably so, since, given the different histories, characters and interests of the two entities, it was something akin to forcing New York City as capital of Vermont.

The constitutional provision was implemented only in 1963, almost ten years after the return of Trieste to Italy (1954); but the shotgun marriage of Trieste and Friuli soon resulted in frictions and quarrels; and, as Simmel had long noted, conflicts bolster identities. Friulian frustrations exploded in 1967 when, for the first time in its history, a Friulian political formation, the "Movimento Friuli," won mass support.

2. FRIULI: AN ECO-SOCIOLOGICAL SKETCH

2.1. A modern region with a rural soul

Up to the nineteen-fifties, Friuli was a peasant society. Urban centers were small and scattered. The bourgeoisie was professional, clerical, and commercial rather than industrial. In the mountainous northern part of the region, some of the land was parcelled out in small family holdings and, to a much greater extent, the woods and highland pastures were communally held. In the central plains, most large feudal estates and communal lands were in the course of being subdivided, through complex institutional and socioeconomic processes, into smaller properties. In the lowlands, only recently reclaimed from the marshes, large capitalist farms with salaried workforces prevailed. These ecological subdivisions correlate in many ways with other variations. For instance, the communal tradition of the mountains is one of the reasons for the stronger-than-average support for socialist parties. In the lowlands, the Communists are strong; whereas in the densely populated central plains and hills Christian Democrats command a large majority. Another correlation is with the type of economic development. When Friuli entered the modern

economy the Alpine economy collapsed and the mountains were almost bereft of population. The newly reclaimed lowlands grew rapidly, not only in the primary sector but also in an industrial sector marked by large investments by outside enterprises (shipyards, chemical works). The central part of Friuli was hit by the industrialization wave in the late 1950s, a backwash of the "Italian economic miracle," and was part of that peculiar pattern of diffused, small-scale, "backyard" industrialization now seen as characteristic of the "Third Italy"

Presently Friuli employs about 10% of the workforce in agriculture, while the rest divide themselves evenly between manufacturing and services. Yet it has retained a certain rural flavour. Modernization is very recent and the memories of the peasant world are still much alive; moreover, most people still live in small communities. Almost three-fourths of Friulians own their homes, usually with a garden they cultivate for vegetables and wine; according to official statistics, their homes are the largest in Italy. Friuli has been suburbanized, rather than urbanized. It has become reasonably prosperous but has not forgotten the customs of ancient poverty.

2.2. The region at the turning point

Viewed from the air, little distinguishes Friuli from neighboring Veneto. Behavior in work, leisure, institutional processes is similar to any other part of northeastern Italy. Structural statistics do not show differences. Even electoral behavior in national elections resembles that of the rest of the country.

Still, there is a widespread sense of distinction. The number of firms incorporating the root "Friul" in their logo is enormous. Village festivals usually feature elements drawn from Friulian folklore—choir songs, theater pieces, groups of singers and dancers. Many of them advertise in Friulian. Many cars sport stickers referring to Friuli. Libraries usually have special displays of literature in Friulian or on Friuli, with dozens, even hundreds, of titles. Everywhere—even on radio and TV, as some local stations broadcast in Friulian—the Friulian language is spoken. And Friulian politics revolve largely around the issues of regional autonomy and the recognition and development of Friulian ethnicity (or "nationality").

Friuli clearly is a region at a turning point. It must decide whether to embrace completely the ethos of modernity, with all that means for culture and language, or whether to stick to its traditional ethnic soul. At the same time that the masses and everyday life become assimilated to Italian and cosmopolitan ways, some elites and minor groups are swimming vigorously against the current, spreading the use of Friulian language into hitherto unheard-of circumstances.

2.3. The problem of language protection and promotion

Friulian is normally spoken by about 650,000 citizens out of about one million in "hi-

historical Friuli," which includes the provinces of Udine, Pordenone, and Gorizia. The rest either belong to other minorities (specially Slovenes along the eastern border) or speak the Venetian dialect along the western border and in the main urban centers. More recently, many are switching to Italian.

Friulian has never been taught in schools. The official, public, "high" language in the region has always been Italian (in some limited contexts, places, and periods it was German). But Friulian reproduced itself quite effortlessly and with remarkable fidelity in the family, the community, the street. A predominantly oral language, it has innumerable local variations; almost every village has its special sound and accent. But it is undoubtedly a single language, mutually comprehensible throughout the region. On the other hand, it is almost not understandable by other Italians, bearing to Italian, as we have already noted, about the same relation as Provençal or Catalan. The Friulian language has become a banner of Friulian identity and search for autonomy. Indeed, one of the motives fuelling the claim for regional autonomy is that only in this way can the language be saved from the rapidly encroaching Italian; and, viceversa, only the feeling of collective identity provided by a common language can fuel the drive for political and administrative self-government.

However, in the last 20 or 30 years the age-old mechanisms for the reproduction of Friulian appear to be breaking down. About half of the parents no longer speak Friulian with their children. The street is no longer a socializing and acculturation mechanism. If this trend continues, in a couple of generations Friulian will become extinct.

This, of course, is simply an outcome of the modernization process, advancing along two different paths. The first is the ethos of upward mobility and socio-economic success. Fluency in Italian has always been a prerequisite for upward mobility and professional success; and now that the rigid peasant class system has vanished, everybody aims at success at school and in professional life. Italian (or, rather, the Venetian dialect) has always been the language of the Friulian bourgeoisie; the abandonment of Friulian is but an aspect of the "embourgeoisement" of the working classes.

The second path is that of the media. In the face of the glitter and spice offered by the national and international cultural industry, the expressions of traditional culture tend to appear pale and dull. Friulian youth are no less addicted to pop culture, rock music and television than youth in any other part of the world.

This situation worries those who still value the traditional culture, and it terrifies the literati. As we have seen, through the centuries Friuli has accumulated a sizable literature. It has nourished a good number of associations and institutions for the promotion of Friulian language, culture, and historiography. The most important of these is the Società Filologica (Society for the cultivation of language), founded after World War I, tolerated by Fascism and then funded by the Regional government, provided it sticks to scholarly studies and does not meddle in practical, political problems. The prospect of an eventual extinction of Friulian does not move the pure scholars; but there is a wider Friulian "intelligentsia" - teachers, priests, amateur poets, writers, and so on - for whom the question is fundamental. Since the mid-1960s, they have been mobilizing wider and wider support for a language policy designed to save the Friulian language.

3. SOME FRIULIAN ETHNIC-REGIONAL COMPLAINTS

3.1. The problem of migrations and planning for development

In the mid-1960s, Friuli still had to fill a sizable gap in the race for economic development in comparison to other northern Italian regions. The first task of the newly instituted regional government of Friuli-Venezia Giulia was to draw up plans to spur economic development. Consultants were hired from the center, as there were then no local planning professionals. Some rather crude documents, high in utopian vision but low in knowledge of local realities, emerged. A first-draft regional plan provided for a concentration of resources in a ribbon of growth poles, and the correlated neglect of the more peripheral parts of the region. In particular, the plight of the mountain area was stated as inevitable, and continuing emigration a "physiological" condition. These statements understandably roused the indignation of the affected areas. The plan was denounced as technocratic, urban-centered, anti-rural, and anti-Friulian.

Migration, until then considered a natural way of life for Friulians, if not one of the peculiar glories of this people, was redefined as the outcome of wrong policies, of sheepish submission, of capitalist exploitation, of "internal colonialism," of "Italian imperialism." This reflected not only a changing attitude toward poverty and socio-economic realities, but also the spread of a new socio-economic, largely Marxist, culture among Friulian intelligentsia. The storms of 1968 gathered in Friuli too.

3.2. The problem of "military servitudes"

Friuli has always been a frontier region, often a "garrison community". In the context of the advanced defense policy of NATO, it became more than ever a military outpost. According to some estimates, at some points in time almost one-third of the Italian army was stationed here. For every 15 citizens there is a soldier. The military presence is conspicuous in terms of barracks, installations, and training grounds. This creates some competition and disturbance for civilian activities and needs. Since the mid-1960s, this has been known as the "problem of military servitudes." Technically, the term implies that the development of settlements and infrastructures must bow to military requirements (e.g. clearance areas around military installations). Military servitudes came under fire in the sixties as one of the main obstacles to socio-economic development of the region.

They also were taken as the clearest example of a generally bureaucratic, centralistic, Roman grip on local affairs, the negation of regional autonomy. Around the military servitudes theme a large alliance of forces rallied: the Communist party, who used it also as part of the anti-Nato campaigns; the budding new-left, pacifist, youth movements; the clergy; but also representatives of the new industrial class, impatient of curbs to the free-location of plants and infrastructure.

2.4. The problem of the university

Friulian students had to go to universities outside their home region: mainly to Trieste and Padua, but also farther away. This resulted, among other things, in higher costs and thus a smaller percentage of people who could meet them. In the mid-1960s, largely at the instigation of the local medical lobby but with the active support of some literati, a movement formed to establish a university in Udine. Friulian students demonstrated en masse their support. The university was seen as a symbol of ethnic and regional dignity, as an instrument of regional economic development, and as an effective tool for the protection and growth of the Friulian culture. But it also was seen, by promoters and adversaries, as an important step towards the divorce from Trieste. It was bitterly, even viciously opposed by the regional capital and by most of the Friulian political establishment in the name of "regional unity" and "institutional efficiency," and for fear of student unrest. The popular pressure was such that regional authorities, and the Trieste University, had gradually to yield; in 1968, some courses of the latter were implanted in Udine. The "battle for the university" was one of the main breeding grounds of the "Movimento Friuli". After a few years of stagnation, the action resumed; in 1976, a petition with 125.000 signatures was filed in; the autonomous university of Udine was finally established the following year, as one of the fall-outs of the big earthquake that hit Friuli in 1976.

2.5. The problem of territorial integrity

By the late 1960s, industrial, urban, and infrastructural development had begun to bite conspicuously into the traditional landscape of the region. At the same time, environmental doctrines began to circulate. Citizen groups started to protest the deterioration of the environment. The first episode was the struggle of a small community, Lestans, against a cement plant that spread its thick soot on the surrounding crops. There were pickets, barricades and arrests, until the industry was defeated. Environmentalists also joined hands with antimilitarists in the struggle against the use of environmentally valuable areas as training grounds. Finally, many public works came under fire, in the name of causes such as protection of agricultural land, conservation of traditional landscape, and ecological balance. One of the most important environmental conflicts concerned the modernization of the agricultural landscape. In most cases, the fight for the environment was waged also in the name of ethnic values and local autonomy against the technocratic planners. In such struggles, farmers, environmentalists, and left-radicals found themselves allied with the more romantic defenders of the traditional landscape.

2.6. The problem of the encroaching Southerners

Friuli is a land of emigration of manual workers and immigration of service workers.

A large percentage of Italian civil servants are Southerners, and hiring practices assure that also in Northern regions most of state employees come from southern regions. The strong military presence had long been a channel for the implantation of southerners in Friuli. In the nineteen-sixties also some rapidly expanding industries began to attract manual workers from the south. Finally, the catering sector (pizza!) also began to be manned mainly by Southerners. This immigration began to raise some hostility. Friulians are a distinctively northern people - taller, on the average, than all other Italian regionals, often fair-skinned and fair-haired; rather cool and reserved, if not downright stiff; soft-speakers, good drinkers, hard workers, homeloving, earnest, disciplined, law-abiding, moderate in sex. The difference with Southerners is often palpable, and the desire to stay different equally so. No collective behaviors that can be labelled as racist have been recorded in Friuli; but some degree, however muted, of ethnic distinctiveness is undeniable. Self-government began to be invoked also in order to limit the invasion of Southerners and of their different ways of life - mafia included.

4. "FRIULANIST" FORCES

4.1 Three major components

The established political parties and institutions were slow in realizing the mobilization potential of Friulian complaints. For some years they variously stigmatized Friulian activists as reactionary, subversive, anti-historical, romantic, or fanatic. Such judgements reflected the different perspectives of the parties as well as real differences in the Friulanist field. Three major components can be distinguished:

a) A traditional, clerical, populist element that has the longest tradition and a wide popular base. A fundamental document of Friulian revival is the 1967 "manifesto" of 529 priests, heirs to the longstanding, if muted, Christian hostility to the Italian lay, liberal, freemasonic, anticlerical state, and later to the Fascist "pagan" and centralist state. They also were steeped in Catholic sociopolitical doctrines, emphasizing local autonomy. The "Democrazia Cristiana" was in 1945-1948 the strongest and almost the only supporter of Friulian regional autonomy and some of the most authoritative intellectual and cultural leaders of Friulanism have been priests (e.g. Giuseppe Marchetti and Francesco Placereani) who emphasize the historical roots of Friuli in the golden age of the patriarchate, the Christian essence of the Friulian ethos, and the value of small-scale, rural, wholesome, communal way of life.

b) The second component is more secular, drawing on a lower-middle social strata of skilled workers, artisans, clerical employees, and the petty bourgeoisie. Many of them have had migratory experiences. Their main motivation is a growing distaste for party politics, corruption, the erosion of traditional values of rigor, honesty, earnestness in work, and resentment of southern encroachment in offices. Most have broken away from lay center-left parties, especially from the socialists. The affinity of Movimento Friu-

li and the Socialist Party, especially in the mountains, has been amply demonstrated by vote fluctuations between the two formations.

c) The third major component is the "new" or radical left, the "orphans of '68" (in Italian, "ex-sessantottini"). Many of the young utopians of those years, disillusioned by the weak revolutionary propensities of the working class at the national and international level and by the failure of revolutionary visions in the Third World and in other "marginal" areas of society, turned to the more modest, if practical, objective of making their regional community an example of an alternative society. They concluded that social palingenesis begins at home, starting with very concrete matters. They discovered the values of localism, regionalism, ethnicity, and environmentalism, and linked individual emancipation with small-scale democracy, local self-sufficiency, pacifism and ecologism. In Friuli these political formations (Radical Party, Proletarian Democracy, etc.) have strong affinity with Friulianist movements. They all speak the same language of Italian/capitalist exploitation of Friuli and angrily protest the American/ imperialist/ NATO domination of this frontier region. They propose a self-consciously utopian model of a Friulian nation, an egalitarian regional society, neutral, nonviolent, self-reliant, in harmony with nature, and freely federated with a network of sister regional-ethnic communities within a "Europe of Regions". The popular appeal of such ideas is limited mainly to younger, more educated, idealistic social groups.

4.2. The rise and decline of the Movimento Friuli

The imperviousness of established parties to Friulian claims led to the formation of a new political organization, the Movimento Friuli (M.F.), which had a spectacular success at the 1968 elections (11.4 % in the province of Udine). Its growth soon was stifled by a set of internal and external circumstances. Internally, the different souls described above produced conflicts and splintering. Soon the leftist faction seized the party, leading to the exit of the Catholic-moderate component. Externally, the established Italian parties mounted a counter-offensive against the newcomer. The strategy was twofold. One was the old stick and carrot policy, the judicious use of the resources - gratifications and sanctions - which political forces command: contracts, assignments, credits, licences, and so on. Many professionals and business people whose livelihoods depend on political benevolence were dissuaded from supporting the M.F., as were leading scholars of Friulian affairs whose research depend on public funding. This prevented the M. F. from benefiting from many intellectual and technical resources and lowered the quality of its intellectual analysis and political propositions.

The second strategy was the dropping of earlier charges against the friulanist movement, the acknowledgement of the seriousness of its claims, and their gradual incorporation into the established parties' agenda. The M.F. was accepted as a legitimate member of the political-administrative system, a party in coalitions and power-sharing. During the seventies and early eighties the M.F. established itself as a small but tightly organized party, with a loyal constituency amounting to about the 5 % of the electorate.

It seems opportune to stress, at this point, that the level of political conflict in Friuli has always been well below the threshold of violence. There never has been anything more serious than some street demonstrations and an occasional roadblock; relations between adversary groups are quite decent.

4.3 External supports to the Friulanist cause

The re-absorption of Friulian political protest movements into the established party system would probably have occurred earlier were it not for a number of external supports:

a) the first was the spread of ethnic-regional movements all over the West and in other parts of Italy in the same years, and for many of the same reasons as in Friuli. They enjoyed increasing attention at both the international and the national levels. The European Community and the Council of Europe gave them serious thought. They posed a general political-cultural issue. Each of them was legitimated by the existence of the others.

b) Secondly, the ethnic-regional issue in Italy was incorporated into the agenda of the Communist Party, in its effort to rally and use all sort of opposition groups to challenge the dominance of the Center coalition. Little in the Communist ideological arsenal could be found in favor of ethnic-regional movements; indeed, its main tradition was strongly centralist and (inter)nationalist; but the opportunistic strategy prevailed. It should be noted that the Italian Communist Party's (half-hearted) conversion to the values of ethnicity and localism was in large measure the achievement of party leaders from Friuli; in particular, to Mario Lizzero.

Because of the wide power and prestige enjoyed by the Communist Party in Italy, its sponsorship of the Friulian (as of other ethnic-regional) claims forced all other parties to fall in line. The most reluctant was the Christian Democratic Party, which is paradoxical given its autonomist traditions and the populist bases. But the paradox is easily explained in terms of the central position the party holds in the Italian socio-political system, and the overwhelming concern for national equilibria and the smooth operation of the national institutional order. As a consequence, however, the Christian Democrats have become the main political foes of Friulanist forces, although there is a strong "anthropological" affinity between them.

c) The third external factor was the 1976 earthquake. The 1000 victims, the suffering and destruction provided a formidable basis of legitimation, the sort of martyrdom and epos needed to substantiate and justify higher political claims and recognition. The earthquake boosted Friulian self-consciousness to unprecedented heights. For weeks Friuli was at the center of national attention and the media were full of praises and admiration for the virtues of this people. Everything they asked for under such circumstances would have to be granted. The national government appropriated ample funds to rebuild the destroyed housing stock, to repair, enlarge and modernize the industrial facilities and the infrastructures; Friuli was veritably flooded by money. It even finally got its own University; whose charter stated that it was to be a tool not only for general social and eco-

conomic progress of the region, but also - and this was then an unicum, and perhaps not only in Italy - for the preservation of the Friulian cultural heritage and language.

5. Conclusion

In recent years, the advancement of Friulian autonomy and identity has become a goal of most political forces in this region (with the only exception of the Right).

Friulian autonomy depends to a large extent from the revision of the relationships with Trieste, and various schemes are under discussion for a soft, consensual divorce between the two. In Italy there are two other examples of regional splitting, South Tirol from Trentino and Molise from Abruzzo. But there are several technical-constitutional difficulties; and, more substantially, there are ancient worries about the destinies of Trieste.

Several bills have been introduced in the National Parliament by almost all parties to provide for some measures of protection and promotion of the ethnic-minority languages, among which Friulian; its use in public administration, in offices, and its teaching in schools. The central problem here is the balance between "group rights" to protection and individual rights to assimilation in the national culture. There are the problems posed by the sizeable non-Friulian-speaking regional population, the hiring policies, and so on. The technical complexities are generally acknowledged, and it probably will take years to work out an acceptable legislative solution.

The ethnic-regional issues have become tightly linked with environmental ones. Although all parties pay lip service to the need for protection of the "ethnic territory," development policies pursued by the establishment often cause environmental effects that raise strong opposition from Friulanist forces.

The strivings for Friulian ethnic-regional identity are thus reduced to its two most elementary terms: language and landscape. They are both threatened by the processes of modernization and it remains to be seen whether, to what degree, and under what conditions they will survive the impact of modernization. It is by no means certain that institutional and normative provisions can harness the forces of technology (communication and production) that are the ultimate causes of the crises of ethnic regions.

What are the prospects for survival and development of ethnic-regional cultures? Can they be reconciled to the requirements of modern, national, and global society? Is contemporary ethnic revival the last spasm of an intellectual elite, for whom historical memories, language, and literature are of paramount importance because they are their bread and butter, or because they try to use ethnic activism to resolve their own identity crises or dissatisfactions with their social status and professional roles? Is the apathy or meager support of the masses the result of alienation and false consciousness? Or is it an indicator that ethnic-regional systems are inadequate to real contemporary needs?

Answers to such questions can come only from empirical evidence which is not at hand. But they also depend on wider considerations and value orientations.

Can local variations in culture, language, and institutional arrangements coexist

with the large-scale uniformity and standardization required by technical-economic efficiency? Does a choice have to be made between participation and efficiency, between large-scale organization and authenticity? Can an acceptable trade-off between such contradictory but equally desirable values be worked out?

This is the classic problem of federalism. There seem to be two basic answers to the problems set by federalism and regionalism. One is that small-scale community, local diversity, participation, authenticity, preservation of cultural heritage, and so on are so important that opposing values must be sacrificed to some extent. In its radical form, this means the "para-primitive solution," the return to simpler ways of life, the rejection of much high-tech civilization. It has been the solution suggested by anarchist-ecologist fringes for at least a century.

The second answer assumes that modern information technology has radically altered the terms of the problem, that computers finally make possible the coexistence of infinite local diversity with the operation of large-scale systems. One of the most passionate contemporary federalist philosophers, Denis de Rougemont, believes that real federalism has only become possible since the computer.

To the first of these answers it has been objected that history cannot be turned back, that evolution is not reversible, that most people would rather choose an easy and materially prosperous, albeit alienated, life than the hardships of small ecological communities, however spiritually or politically rewarding.

The second answer prompts the objection that a computer-assisted federalism would still be something radically different from a collection of small, local, autonomous, ethnic-regional communities. Ethnic-regional cultures are the product of centuries and millennia of interaction between men and nature. They evolved in the context of peasant life, in more or less isolated environments, in the course of labor in the fields, in village rituals, in the long winter evenings around the fireplace, when the elders told stories and sang songs to their wide-eyed offspring. All this is irretrievably gone and cannot be recreated by computer.

What remains is the value of local diversity. There are well-known arguments for it based on principles of biological evolution and general systems theory: diversity as a source of both stability and further evolution. There also are more philosophical arguments based on the eternal value of all human cultural creations, on the absolute worth and dignity of all traditions and languages. Further, there is the sociopolitical argument, that political participation at the grassroots - the basis of real democracy and liberty - can only be motivated by the defense of cultural diversity (from the outgroups) and identity (within the ingroup). And there is, finally, the more pragmatic-hedonistic argument that a world without regional variation in institutions, modes of communication, mores, patterns of architecture, preferences for musical rhythms and melodies, in the tastes for food, drink, dress, and bodily shapes would be an unbearably boring world to live in.

I believe that the protection and promotion of diversity, even at the expense of some degree of efficiency and material development, is an important and positive collective goal and a worthy object for scientific research.